

BAREFOOT RUNNING



New ideas, technologies and training methods are constantly revolutionizing and advancing sport, and running is no exception. These changes enhance running experience and performance for beginners and seasoned runners alike. The contentious and revolutionary concepts of barefoot and minimalist running are dominating current discussions and intriguing running communities all over the world.

Whether you're new to running or have been pounding the pavement for many years, barefoot running can provide benefits to everyone. If you're willing to take up the challenge and take a somewhat primitive approach to your running, you will gain a more intimate relationship with body and earth and reap the rewards. If you're looking to improve your running efficiency, alter your gait or simply reinvigorate your tired training regime, then barefoot running may be just what the doctor ordered.

Conventional running shoes have a lot of structure, support and cushioning to protect our feet from the harsh reality of running. We're drawn to these features when looking for the 'best shoe'. Most shoes encourage runners to strike heel first as they incorporate a differential of approximately 12mm from heel to forefoot (meaning your heel sits higher in the shoe than your forefoot). Conversely, barefoot shoes such as the Vibram FiveFingers are designed without a heel-forefoot drop, to mimic the human foot. They provide functional support by promoting good posture, enhancing muscle balance and activation throughout the legs and feet. This improves proprioception (your perception of where your body is within space) and sensitivity.

Eliminating the heel lift encourages natural posture by reducing anterior pelvic tilt and decreasing pressure on the lumbar spine. This improves the balance and function of lower back and pelvic muscles like the gluteal, tensor fascia latte and iliopsoa. It can also reduce the risk of suffering posterior muscle tightness in the hamstrings and calves, which is relatively common amongst us runners.

Encompassing the true notion of barefoot, Vibrams separate the toes into their own pockets. This allows the toes to spread naturally, which promotes good proprioception and activation of the intrinsic foot muscles, and better balance both in stance and during gait. These benefits are not exclusive to runners, but are worthwhile to everyone. This can promote good health and well being in later life by reducing posture-related injuries and allowing prolonged

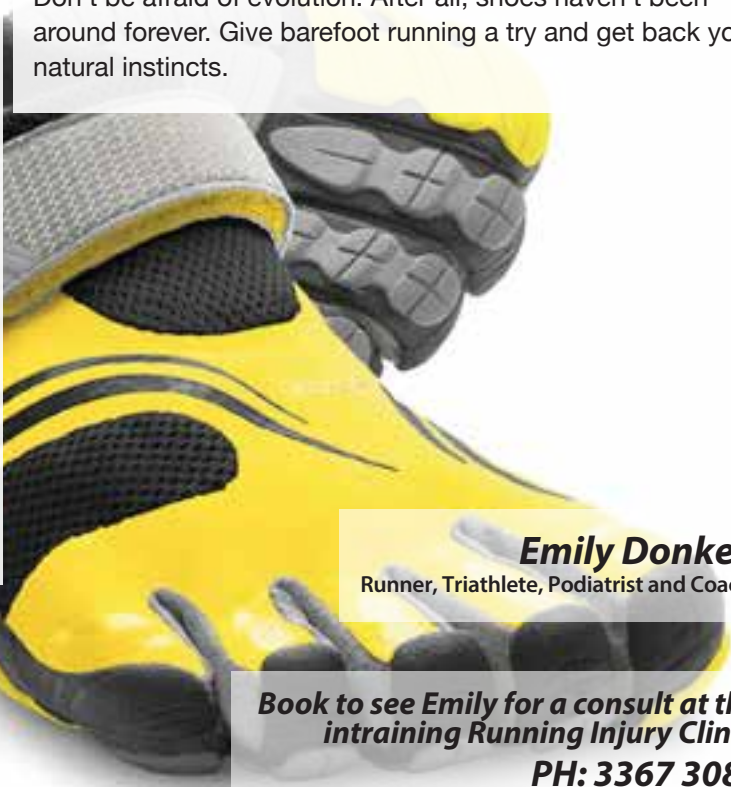
participation in physical activity.

More specific to running, the primary benefit of using Vibrams is a reduction in peak forces. Braking forces transmit shock up the legs through the various structures and joints, which are common contributors to overuse injuries. These forces are typically greatest at heel strike and are exacerbated by overstriding and striking the ground in front of the body's centre of mass.

Vibrams are not cushioned and don't have an elevated heel. Therefore they encourage a mid-forefoot strike and shorter, faster stride, which distributes force and allows the muscles and joints to attenuate shock through more natural motion. For many people, running is a quadriceps-dominated exercise. However, running in Vibrams generates a different strike pattern and challenges this notion with much more emphasis on pulling with the hamstrings during swing phase. Following on from this, a majority of runners making the switch to barefoot running will experience long-term gains in efficiency and cadence.

It is important to realize that not everyone can run effectively when forefoot striking, especially over long distances. However, incorporating barefoot running into weekly training can result in a range of benefits. It can improve gait and provide alternative muscle stimulus, and initiate many other changes. Plus it adds a bit of variety to help boost interest and motivation for training.

Come to intraining Running Centre and talk to our staff about getting the best fit for your feet. We will observe your running style and help you select the right pair of shoes for your feet. Don't be afraid of evolution. After all, shoes haven't been around forever. Give barefoot running a try and get back your natural instincts.



Emily Donker
Runner, Triathlete, Podiatrist and Coach

**Book to see Emily for a consult at the
intraining Running Injury Clinic.
PH: 3367 3088**